Screening for Colorectal Cancer

1. Why is colorectal cancer screening so important?
   - Colorectal cancer is the 2nd most common cause of cancer deaths in the U.S.
   - It affects men and women.
   - Early stages of colorectal cancer often have no symptoms
   - Colorectal cancer is preventable and curable (over 90% chance of cure) when detected early with annual screening test for occult (hidden) blood.

2. What is a fecal occult blood test (FOBT)?
   - Some polyps and cancers bleed in very small amounts that you can't see. This test checks for the "hidden" blood in your stool.
   - This test can be done at home. With the kit from your doctor, you'll take samples of your stool and mail them to a lab. The instructions with the kit will explain how to perform the test. You will need to avoid certain foods for two days before taking the samples.

3. What does a positive fecal occult blood test mean?
   - Most patients with hidden blood in the stool don't have cancer. The test is good at detecting blood in the stool, but it can't tell where it came from. You may need additional tests like a colonoscopy to see the cause of your bleeding. For example, besides colorectal cancer, hemorrhoids and ulcers can also cause blood in the stool. Benign polyps usually do not bleed and therefore are not detectable by FOBT, but they are detectable by sigmoidoscopy and colonoscopy.

4. Who should receive an annual FOBT?
   - All men and women age 45 or older.
   - Men and women younger than 45 who have a personal or family history of colorectal cancer, polyps or other cancers should consult with their doctor about the type of screening tests they need.
   - Anyone who has had rectal bleeding or a change in bowel habits should consult their doctor as soon as possible.

5. The National Cancer Institute recommendations include:
   - Beginning at age 45, both men and women should have: A yearly fecal occult blood test plus sigmoidoscopy every 5 years, or colonoscopy every 10 years.

6. Although colon cancer affects many people in our (Khmer/Vietnamese) community, it is preventable and treatable especially when detected early. Along with your traditional health practices, we encourage you to consider the following lifestyle choices:
   - Diet: Eat moderately. Eat less red meat, less salty or fermented food. Eat fruits and vegetables daily. Drink water regularly.
   - Take a multivitamin with folate daily.
   - Don't smoke and limit the use of alcohol
   - Be active and maintain a healthy weight. Working in the garden or walking is good exercise for you.
   - Relaxation: Find time to relax your body and mind.